#10 MAY-JUN 2025

YOUR COMPLETE INDIE GAMING GUIDE

indie

FROM UNDERTALE TO DELTARUNE – WE TALK EXCLUSIVELY TO THEIR CREATOR, TOBY FOX

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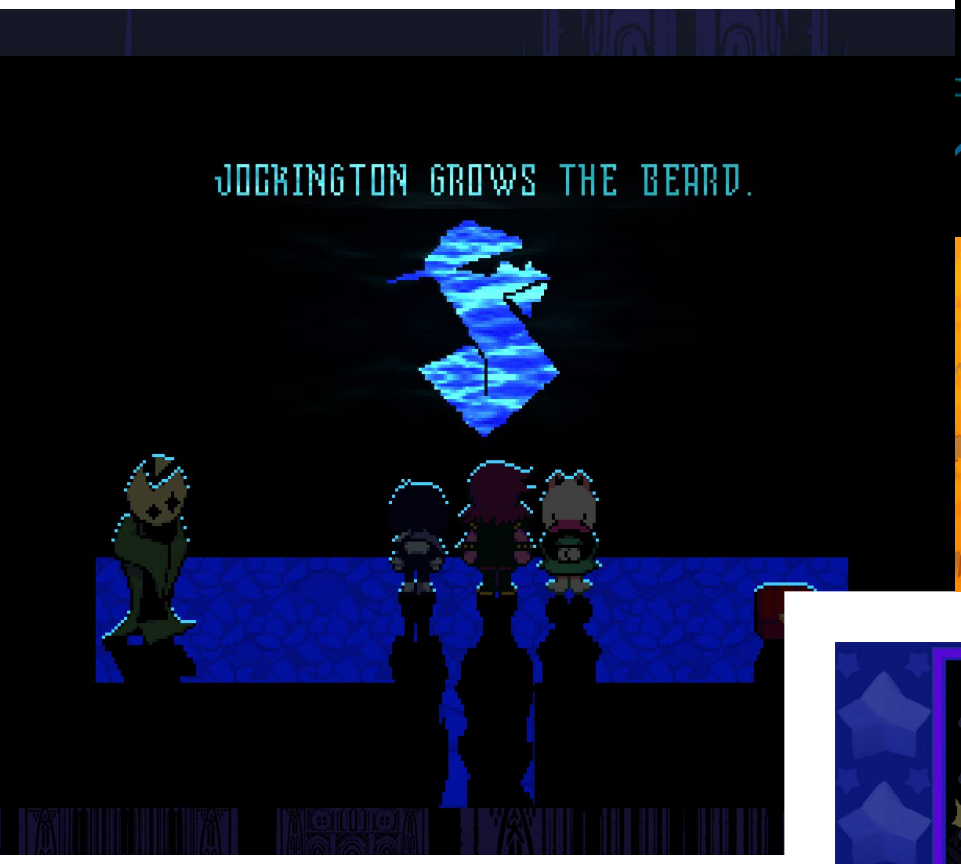
FANTASTIC MR. FOX

For many gamers, the release of *Chapters 1-4* of *DELTARUNE* is one of their highlights of 2025. The genius behind both *DELTARUNE* and *UNDERTALE* is Toby Fox, and in a rare interview we asked him about his creative process, and how an unknown developer managed to create one of the most popular RPGs in recent history.



Protagonists Kris, Susie and Ralsei pick up their instruments for a *Rock Band*-style mini-game in *DELTARUNE: Chapters 3-4*.

It's fair to say that *UNDERTALE* took the gaming world by surprise on its 2015 release. On the face of it, it appeared to be just another Japanese-inspired RPG with a tinny soundtrack and 8-Bit-style graphics. But then people actually started to play it. And the people that played it loved it. And they told other people, which then inspired the larger press outlets to review it, and before you knew it, *UNDERTALE* had become pretty much the only thing that gamers were talking about – and, more importantly, playing.

The success of the PC version of *UNDERTALE* enabled conversions to the PlayStation 4 and Vita in 2017, the Switch in 2018 and the Xbox One in 2021.

As the popularity of the game grew and spread, live orchestral *UNDERTALE* concerts began to pop up. There's a rare 10th anniversary one being held at London's Eventim Apollo on June the 22nd. If you're interested, then tickets start from around £56 and are available from **www.eventim.co.uk**. Oh, and in 2022, a track from *UNDERTALE*, *Megalovania*, was used as the soundtrack for a circus performance for the Pope. But, incredibly, that's not the only connection the Pope has with the game. In 2016 a physical copy was given to His Holiness by a YouTube influencer during a staged meeting. Whether or not he actually played it remains a mystery that we will sadly never know the answer to.

In 2022, a track from *UNDERTALE* was used as the soundtrack for a circus performance for the Pope.

And then there's the merch. Lots and lots of merch. Currently you can choose from over 100 pieces of official *UNDERTALE* merch (plus hundreds of unofficial ones) – including Flowey badges and Annoying Dog mugs. If you're only going to get one piece of merch related to the game though, we recommend getting hold of the soundtrack, as it really is superb.

Amazingly, *UNDERTALE* was Toby Fox's first fully completed game, and it was created using the game creation software, GameMaker Studio. We asked Fox what the pros and cons of using a package such as this were…

"The pros are that we are very familiar with the engine, and it's rather fast to create and prototype things. We also get a lot of developer support. I think it's a great engine to make a 2D game with.

"Cons? Well, historically we have been forced to update the engine in order to maintain compatibility with consoles. When you do a significant update, the entire game will need to be retested in case the update has caused any part of the game to behave differently or even throw errors. Until we are able to continue using a single version forever, every couple of years we are going to big trouble town in the big trouble train – and we have to build the track ourselves.

"It's like an eight-person marble race from YouTube but all the marbles are individual, different-coloured Gromits from the train scene in *The Wrong Trousers*, placing down tracks as fast as possible. He has to survive. And when one of him wins, it plays MIDI music and shows a really weird nickname for him."

Ridin' Solo

The reason that Toby Fox's name is commonly used when discussing either *UNDERTALE* or *DELTARUNE*, is that so much of the game is designed by him. Concept art and sprite work for both games is handled by American illustrator Temmie Chang, but coding and music and all the bits in between for *UNDERTALE* and *DELTARUNE: Chapter 1* was all Fox's work.

"I really wanted to prove myself," said Fox, "so I was happy to try and tackle everything alone. But even if I wanted to collaborate with someone, I don't think it would've been possible.

"I didn't have any money, didn't have any contacts, and that version of GameMaker didn't really allow two people to work on the same project at once. If there was another person, we would have just gone back and forth breaking each other's project file over and over. I know it sounds really romantic but I'm shy."

Given *UNDERTALE*'s popularity, a second game was inevitable, but Fox has never been one for following convention, so rather than create something that would be sold as a standalone game, he announced in October 2018 that the first chapter of his new episodic game, *DELTARUNE*, would be released the following day on October the 31st. And for free.

Although not a direct sequel to *UNDERTALE*, *DELTARUNE* does share similar gameplay and some of the characters – although the setting is new and the battle system has been remodelled. And those of you who are fans of word puzzles may also spot that *DELTARUNE* is in fact an anagram of *UNDERTALE*…

Fans were delighted, as were reviewers. Fundamentally, *DELTARUNE* was more of the same, but considering the popularity of *UNDERTALE*, that wasn't a concern for the majority of reviewers and gamers.

But with the first chapter downloaded and completed, fans of the game were eager to find out when they could continue the game's story. Unfortunately, they would have a bit of a wait for the second chapter though, as although its development began in the middle of 2020, it wouldn't be actually released until September of the following year. Fox wanted to explore alternative options for the game's development, but after some research he concluded that GameMaker Studio 2 (the updated sequel) was still the best choice – a belief that a lot of 2D indie developers share.

Chapter and Verse

Skipping forward a bit, work started on chapters three, four and five in 2022, with the idea to release them as a paid game once they'd all been completed. That plan changed slightly the following year though, and so now we have the release of *DELTARUNE: Chapters 1-4*, a compilation of the first two chapters, plus two brand-new ones. This was released on June the 4th for PC, PS4/5 and Switch, and also on the launch day for Switch 2 (June the 5th).

According to the chapter select screen in *DELTARUNE: Chapter 2*, there will be a total of seven chapters to *DELTARUNE*'s story – and, most importantly, just one ending as *UNDERTALE* had a total of three main ones plus a large number of variations for each of them. Work has already begun on *Chapter 5*, and Fox has assured fans that remaining chapters of the game will be released free of charge.

One other difference between *UNDERTALE* and *DELTARUNE* is the size of the development

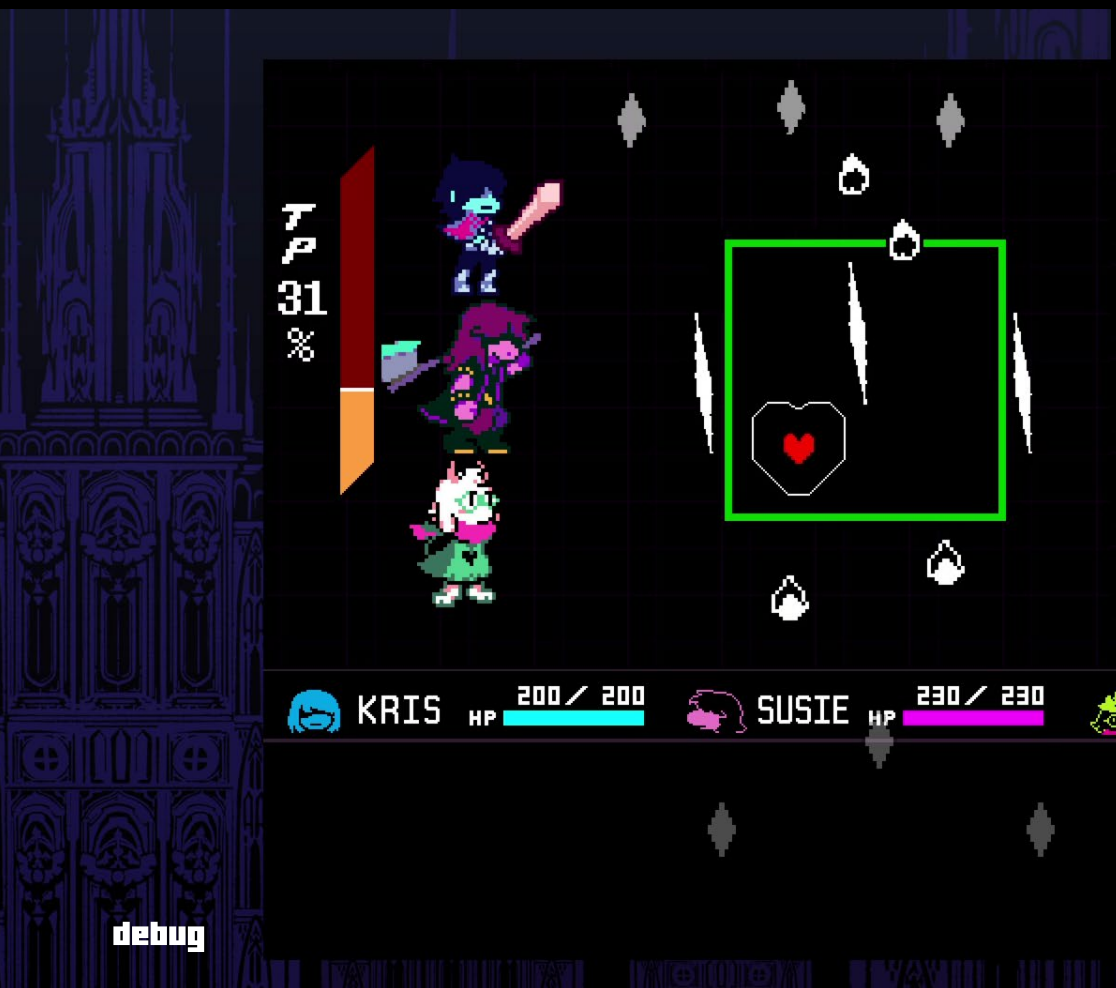
THE MAN TO THANK FOR ALL THIS…

Toby Fox doesn't tend to do many interviews, and, quite rightly, he prefers to keep a low profile and crack on with what he's really good at: making videogames.

So we dug around a bit to see what we could find out...

He's a lifelong fan of Japanese RPGs, and has always been obsessed with their soundtracks – his classic song *Megalovania* is apparently inspired by Yoko Shimomura's track *Megalomania*, which is from the Japanese RPG, *Live A Live*.

Also, based on the replies to the questions we sent him, we suspect he may well be a fan of the classic film, *Groundhog Day*…



For those who don't recognise them (meaning you haven't played *DELTARUNE*) this is Kris, the main 'hero' of the game.

team. Although *Chapter 1* was developed solely by Fox (again, with Chang helping out on the sprite/illustration side), the team was expanded from *Chapter 2* onwards. In order to speed up production of the game, three team members worked on it day-to-day, with a few more helping out as needed.

Fox had a longstanding issue with pain in his hand and wrist, which unfortunately worsened during the development of *Chapter 2* – to the point where even using the keyboard was too uncomfortable for him, and coding had to be done through voice-to-text software. We asked Fox about this time and whether he preferred to work solo or in a team.

"Programming things alone is goated and blessed with the sauce. Everything you make will always be your vision, and sometimes it really helps to develop and iterate your ideas by trying them out yourself. Even if you can explain a concept to somebody else, there is no substitution for the brain blast you might undergo at the last minute when you do it yourself.

"However, nowadays, I have a pretty strict physical limit as to how much I can type, and I am limited to using speech to text for most of my written communication. So, I don't actually program anything any more. Occasionally I do go on call with somebody and tell them exactly what to do however.

"But I'm not saying I think working completely alone is the best option. I would probably never do it again. Unless your scope is very restrictive, creating a game alone is just too much of a combination of too much impossible and too much annoying. The consequence of that is that not everything is always going to be perfectly aligned with how I would do it, but still, as long as the overall experience is enjoyable, it's fine."

When it comes to *UNDERTALE* and *DELTARUNE*, gamers fall into several camps: the ones that'll never play it because RPGs aren't 'their thing', the ones that quite like RPGs but won't try them because it looks too retro, and the gamers that are prepared to give it go. Having played both, I do feel sorry for those in the first two camps

In *UNDERTALE* (and later *DELTARUNE*) [Fox] created games where characters and storyline were the primary focus. He wanted the player to be constantly surprised and delighted by the unfolding tale.

as they are missing out. *UNDERTALE* is one of those games that takes over your life while you're playing it. Games that stick with me are the ones that drag me in and allow me to become invested in the characters and the story remarkably quickly. My belief is that, ultimately, role-playing games share a lot of DNA with the original text-based adventures. Both should have a dramatic and engaging storyline, and like the best books and films, you should be engrossed from start to finish. I suspect, based on his work output over the past 10 years, that's a belief that Fox shares to some degree.

The Secret of its Success

So the question surely is: what is the secret to the success of the games? Why are they both hailed as classics of the genre, when the ones that inspired them – like the *Mother* series – are not quite so revered in this writer's opinion. Fox believed that most RPGs were boring to play, more style than content, so in *UNDERTALE* (and later *DELTARUNE*) he created games where characters and storyline where the primary goal. He wanted the player to be constantly surprised and delighted by the unfolding tale. And funny. Fox's games had to be funny, too – he cites *Mr. Bean* as a strong influence on the game's comedic attitude. Hard to imagine that initially, but consider that in both the *Mr. Bean* TV show and *UNDERTALE*, the lead character is a fish out of water; a unique entity dropped into a world that they don't fit into. There's potential for comedy of a slightly darker nature, which both the TV and game explore.

All that would mean nothing if Fox wasn't able to construct a game framework inhabited by interesting characters woven into a storyline that grabbed hold of you tightly and kept you gripped until the end credits. Thankfully for us gamers, that's exactly what he was able to do. It's impossible to say much more without spoiling it for those of you yet to experience the games, but suffice to say that both *UNDERTALE* and *DELTARUNE* are quite unlike any other RPG you've played before – in a good way.

One of the games' USPs is the way they deal with combat. Bearing in mind that your species is a new one to the monsters living in the Underworld, many don't immediately become aggressive when they first make contact with you. In fact, you do have the option to not attack any of them, and the game can be completed without killing anything. That's not to say that you won't, but it's refreshing to have the option.

As we mentioned before, the soundtrack to both games is definitely one to check out. Aside from the live orchestral shows, particular songs have been covered by a number of artists and styles – jazz, anyone? No? Sure?

The whole soundtrack was written by Fox. He prefers to write the tracks before programming that particular scene in the game, because it helps him decide how it should go. We wanted to find out more about Fox's musical background, so naturally the only sensible thing to do was ask him…

"I took piano lessons in Second Grade and I played the trumpet in Middle and High School. In Middle School I began playing the piano again, this time trying to play every single videogame song I knew by ear. This taught me a lot about song structure and chords. I'm pretty much entirely self-taught.

"When I was in High School, I joined the music team for a webcomic called *Homestuck*. Creating music for this comic was my first significant foray into working with a DAW [Digital Audio Workstation]. I learned basically everything from that time. I don't know if I ever learned anything else."

Fox's compositions have become hugely popular in the gaming community, and not just the indie one. He's contributed songs to the soundtracks for *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* and also *Pokémon* games.

Wonderfully Weird

If you ask Fox about the success of the games, as we did, his simple answer was: "There's a lot more weird people out there than I thought…" This leads us to believe that Fox is probably the most surprised out of any of us at the popularity of both games. He's created exactly the sort of game he wanted to play, and luckily for him, it would appear that a significant number of gamers want to play them too. We can't wait to see what he does next, as it's bound to be fantastic.

YOUR NEXT OBSESSION

In a nutshell, here's a breakdown of all of Toby's games so far…

UNDERTALE *(2015-2021)*

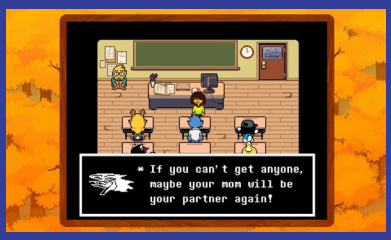
PC, Mac, PS4/Vita, Switch, Xbox

The game that started it all, and Toby Fox's first completed game. Fantastic story and characters, plus a unique combat system.

DELTARUNE: Chapter 1 *(2018-2025)*

PC, Mac, PS4/5, Switch 1/2

The first part of the seven-chapter epic adventure. Improvements over *UNDERTALE*, and shares some characters/locations, but not a straight sequel.



DELTARUNE: Chapter 2 *(2021-2025)*

PC, Mac, PS4/5, Switch 1/2

Fox believes that *Chapter 2* could well be the largest chapter in the whole series, mainly due to the number of cut-scenes and characters.

DELTARUNE: Chapters 1-4 *(2025)*

PC, Mac, PS4/5, Switch 1/2

The latest release, and a whopping four chapters (two original ones and two brand-new ones). Chapters 5, 6 and 7 will be released for free over the coming years.

* The dog absorbed the back cover.

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